



Public Health Brief

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Yes, snow, Santa, and probably gatherings of family and friends before the new year are upon us! To protect ourselves, our families, and our communities during this winter respiratory virus season, we know the drill only too well, as this is not new. We know what we need to do!

Current Situation

Alpine County residents of all ages are experiencing illness from Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV), seasonal influenza and COVID-19, with increases following the Thanksgiving break. Fortunately, I am not aware of any hospitalizations so far. We continue to monitor hospitalizations and trends related to winter respiratory viruses, including flu, COVID-19, and RSV, in California, Nevada, and the nation.

California has just been moved into the "PURPLE" zone by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which means higher levels of influenza activity are being reported. Since October 1, the CDC reports that there have been 8.7 million illnesses caused by influenza, with 78,000 hospitalizations, and 4,500 deaths, including 14 children. These elevated early hospitalization rates are the highest that have been seen in a decade. In the US, flu hospitalizations have nearly doubled in the last week! See: [Weekly US Map: Influenza Summary Update | CDC](#). The bad and good news:

- Bad news: Children, adults, and pregnant females have lower rates of receiving the annual flu vaccine than in previous years.



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Alpine County Health Department, 75-B Diamond Valley Rd., Markleeville, CA 96120

Alpine County Board of Supervisors, Phone: (530) 694-2281

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- Good news: This years' vaccine is well matched to the currently circulating strains, with a 49% decrease in the risk of hospitalization.
- Good news: In Alpine County, the Health Department has vaccinated 40% of our seniors aged 65 years and older, and 16% of residents 6 months of age and older. In addition, an unknown # of residents have received vaccine at pharmacies or at the Washoe Tribal Health Center.

I know we are all done with COVID, right? However, there are still more than 300 folks dying every day across the USA from Covid-19, and most of them are elderly and unvaccinated. I am currently home on isolation due to a COVID-19 illness, which is mild thanks to our incredible vaccines including the most recent bivalent booster. In Alpine County, the Health Department has administered the bivalent booster to 45% of seniors on the east side of the county, 50% in Bear Valley, and almost 20% of all persons eligible! Almost 100,000,000 cases have now been reported in the USA, with >1,000,000 deaths. (Alpine County has had 2 deaths directly from COVID, and 2 others where COVID illness was a contributing factor.) During this past week there has been an increase in hospitalizations across the country following Thanksgiving when multiple generations from differing geographic areas gathered indoors with decreased ventilation. Expect the same following Christmas and New Year's holidays.

The third virus in this "tridemic" is RSV, which primarily affects the very young and elderly persons. Hospital beds for pediatric patients are in very short supply, especially at the pediatric intensive care (PICU) level. Parents and community healthcare providers have been unable to access the usual resources equipped and available to handle very sick and very young infants. Washoe County alone reports >1,000 cases since Oct 1, which is more than they usually see in a year. Although these high numbers have stretched our healthcare systems to the brink, there are some encouraging signs that numbers may have plateaued and are trending downward. There is no vaccine currently for RSV.

With these significant levels of stress and strain on our healthcare system (especially staff), not just with children from RSV but now with adults with flu or COVID-19, we face continued challenges, and do not know how much worse things will get in the weeks and months to come. With many viruses already circulating at high levels in California, it is important to take the following measures to ensure our hospitals have capacity to care for all vulnerable Californians, including babies and children, who need lifesaving treatment.

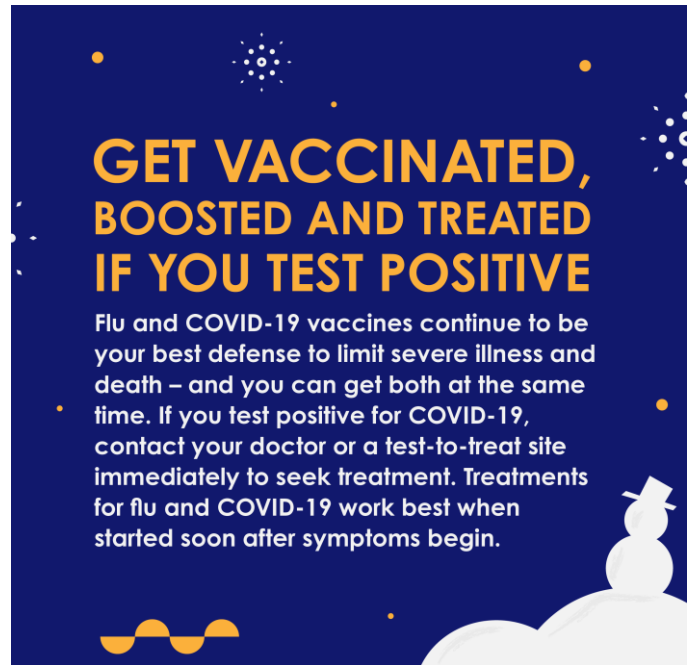
The most important measure to take is to get vaccinated. Vaccine is available for both COVID-19 and influenza, but not for RSV. National rates of COVID-19 vaccine with the newer bivalent booster stand at 12.7% of the population >5 years of age. As mentioned above, Alpine County is doing well, especially our seniors!!!



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This Winter season, celebrate and gather in ways that limit the spread of respiratory viruses like respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), flu, and COVID-19. Follow these [five tips to protect yourself and others](#) from winter viruses:



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California Surgeon General Dr. Diana Ramos shares information on RSV (respiratory syncytial virus), flu, and COVID-19 and tips for how to limit the spread in our families and communities.

<https://youtu.be/llvjERWSQZs>



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As a parent or guardian, it's important to be aware of prevention methods to protect your child from winter viruses. Here are some tips on how to care for your loved ones at home and when you should seek care from a medical provider for your child.

IS MY CHILD AT HIGHER RISK FOR SEVERE DISEASE?

Children who are at higher risk of severe disease include:

- Younger children, particularly 6 months old or younger

- Premature or low-birth-weight infants

- Children with chronic medical conditions, including chronic lung diseases, heart disease, disorders weakening the immune system, or neuromuscular disorders

HOW CAN I CARE FOR MY CHILD AT HOME?

For mild symptoms, these tips can help ease discomfort:

- Reduce congestion with nasal saline with gentle suctioning. Cool-mist humidification also helps to clear congestion.

- Have your child get plenty of rest and drink clear fluids such as water, broth, or sports drinks to prevent dehydration. For infants, use electrolyte beverages such as Pedialyte. Healthy snacks and small meals are recommended.

HOW CAN I CARE FOR MY CHILD AT HOME?

- If your child has a fever (100° or higher), acetaminophen and ibuprofen can be given to children 6 months of age and older. Infants and children should not be given aspirin as this can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye's syndrome.

- Only use medications for infants less than 6 months old under the guidance of your health care provider.

HOW CAN I CARE FOR MY CHILD AT HOME?

- Follow dosing instructions listed on the back of the medication or from your health care provider.

- Stay home at least 24 hours after there is no longer a fever or signs of a fever (without the use of fever-reducing medicine).



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WHEN SHOULD I SEEK CARE FOR MY CHILD?

Call ahead to get medical advice and see what you can do at home and when it is best to come in to be examined.

Seek evaluation right away if your child has:

- Fast breathing, flaring nostrils, head bobbing, grunting, or wheezing while breathing; belly breathing; pauses in breathing.
- Symptoms of dehydration, like urinating less frequently and fewer tears when crying.
- Gray or blue color to tongue, lips, or skin.
- Significantly decreased activity and alertness.

WHEN SHOULD I SEEK CARE FOR MY CHILD?

- Symptoms that worsen or do not improve after 7 days
- Fever in those under 3 months of age (12 weeks)
- Fever above 104°F repeatedly for a child of any age
- Poor sleep or fussiness, chest pain, ear tugging, or ear drainage



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For vaccines, testing kits, Paxlovid, and any questions (all free!), call us at 530-694-2146. If you “Press option 1”, we will respond to your voice message within 24 hours 7 days a week, including holidays.



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